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need to limit terms and take on our  
selves the usual responsibilities of  
elected government?  
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The answer in every case is "the  
voters" — we, the people, only  
about half of whom, if that, bother to  
vote. We, not creatures from Mars,

— John P. Keast of the Free Congress

# The Grove's *The Ark* must survive the pressure from developers

FROM the roadside, the two-story house at 3939 Hardie Road in Coconut Grove does not seem unique. Only when you become aware of its origins and tour its interior do you realize its historical significance and charm.

Fondly called *The Ark* by old-time Grove residents, the landlocked house at 3939 Hardie once was the clubhouse of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club. Designed by Commodore Ralph Munroe, it stood, beginning in 1905, on pilings out in the bay. It was connected by a pier to Camp Biscayne, a tourist house and cottages that now is a subdivision of the same name south of Munroe's *Barnacle* home-stead.

It wasn't until 1926 that *The Ark* went ashore and became a home just off Ingraham Highway to several generations of Grove residents. Unoccupied, it now is for sale. Many fear that someone will buy the attractive 130-by-216-foot property, tear down the house, and build anew.

"The tragedy of *Coconut Grove*," laments attorney Toby Muir, a former occupant of the house, "is that there is no awareness of the uniqueness of the Grove. Developer-sponsored moves have been to increase density, and every lot that has a grand old house and a beautiful garden soon will have two pink stucco houses and no garden."

*The Ark* is first seen as an oddly-designed residence. The bottom floor of the clubhouse contains a large central room, a small kitchen, a bathroom under the stairwell, and two porches — fore and aft, I presume, would be an apt



HOWARD  
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description. The second floor, similarly, contains one large room, a bathroom, and a veranda. The interior walls all are of diagonally placed tongue-in-groove wood, and the electric wiring all is on the outside of the interior walls, as the building originally was constructed without electricity.

According to Stuart McIver's centennial history of the yacht club, published in 1987, the clubhouse originally was 40-by-25 feet. The rear porch was added later. The large room on the bottom floor was used as a game room, and the upper floor consisted of an office, storeroom, lounge, and an open veranda, now enclosed.

By 1926, *The Ark* had outlived its usefulness as a clubhouse for the yacht club and was bought by contractor Bob Ervin. In his memoir, Munroe recalls that Ervin purchased the clubhouse for \$1, slid the structure "bodily" onto a barge, and towed it up one of the canals into the outskirts of Coral Gables, where it now sits disguised as a residence.

It actually is on a Grove subdivision once owned by pioneer J.W. Ewan. The list of occupants is varied. One of its longest-term owners was an artist named Dumann Weaver, who lived in the house from 1932 at least through 1942.

In 1958, Miami author/journalist Helen Muir purchased it from Ella Lewis for Dorothy and Milton MacKaye. Mrs. MacKaye, in addition to appearing regularly in the *Ladies Home Journal*, was a prominent writer of mystery novels who wrote under the name of Dorothy Cameron Denney. She is still alive, but quite ill. Milton MacKaye, now deceased, also wrote books, but as the "also" of autobiographies. He was the ghost behind the personality's name.

"Dorothy and Milton collected houses," Helen Muir recalls. "They had properties everywhere. We had become friends, and when I saw

that this historic house was available, I called them in Washington. They authorized me to buy it for them sight unseen."

The MacKayes spent their winters at 3939 Hardie, but returned North in the summer to residences in Connecticut and Washington.

In 1979, Muir's son, Toby, and his wife Celeste rented the house from the MacKayes, but upon the birth of two children found it necessary to leave the one-bedroom home in 1985.

William Ross MacKaye, a former religion editor of the *Washington Post* and son of the MacKayes, recently wrote to Helen Muir that the family no longer could keep the property, particularly because of rising taxes. It was put up for sale several months ago, listed with Flynn Associate, Inc., of Coral Gables.

Phyllis Roth of Flynn reports that among persons interested in the house are several who expressed a desire to keep it rather than tear it down.

## Good old Cocoanut Grove

Toby Muir, whose wife Celeste is a circuit judge, remains pessimistic as he sees existing zoning laws in the city of Miami constantly changed to meet the pressure of developers. Currently, the property at 3939 Hardie is zoned for a single residence.

In this particular case, a change to multiple dwelling might be an opportunity to save the old clubhouse, with new owners building elsewhere on the spacious lot. But with the way things are going lately *ris-a-vis* historic preservation and developer pressure, it more likely would be that two new houses would be built on the property. And that would be a shame. *The Ark*, with its Munroe connection, is one of the most important remaining historic links to the pioneer era of the quaint bayside fishing and sailing village called, and spelled, Cocoanut Grove.

"...crossing the ocean by boat  
billion. Not only did you risk your  
life for chewing tobacco, but you  
sacrificed everything to get a

"...which are saying, 'Our  
country, right or wrong, as long  
as we don't have to pay for it.' "  
— Los Angeles Times Syndicate



HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA

*Biscayne Bay Yacht Club, built in 1905*



CANDACE BARBOT/Miami Herald Staff

*...now a residence at 3939 Hardie Road*

10/30/90  
Miami Herald